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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to conduct an exploratory investigation of a new course initiative in counselor education for working with culturally diverse populations. The study investigated: (1) outcomes of curriculum targeting multicultural competencies; (2) whether prior training experience in multicultural counseling would have an impact on learning outcomes of students in graduate level courses; and (3) students' meaningful experiences during acquisition of multicultural counseling competencies. The results indicate that the course had an impact on the self-reported multicultural competencies of the participants. Students reported significant increases in both their self-awareness and knowledge/skills for working with culturally diverse clients. Self-awareness is a precondition to the application of knowledge and skills with culturally diverse populations. The results also suggest that the diverse experiences of students do not need to detract from the relevance of course material. They conclude that instruction that promotes both experiential and theoretical learning activities also promotes the acquisition of competencies for professional practice with culturally diverse clients. (Contains 36 references.) (JDM)

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Counsellor Education for Developing Multicultural Counselling Competencies

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University of Calgary

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Running head: COUNSELLOR EDUCATION

Counsellor Education for Developing Multicultural Counselling Competencies

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The increasing diversity of North America's population challenges counsellors to meet the needs of clients whose cultural backgrounds are different than their own (Hall, 1997; Arthur, 1998). A multicultural approach to counselling is underscored by research that suggests there are negative effects for clients when culture is not a central consideration in assessment and intervention practices. Failure to understand underlying cultural factors accounts for negative bias in the diagnosis of mental health issues, inappropriate treatment, the lower return rates and less satisfaction with professional services, and, consequently, the negative perceptions of minority groups towards formal counselling (Allison, Echemendia, CrawFord, & Robinson, 1996; Dana, 1998; Leong, Wagner, & Tata, 1995; Malgady, 1996; Zayas, Torres, Malcolm, & DesRosiers, 1996). Concerns about culture-responsive counselling have prompted the articulation of multicultural counselling competencies in the domains of self-awareness, knowledge, and skills (Arredondo et al., 1996; Sue, Arredondo & McDavis, 1992) and the development of ethical guidelines for practice with diverse populations (American Psychological Association, 1993; Canadian Psychological Association, 1996).

It is only when culture is considered as a central construct in professional practices that counselling will become consumer-driven. Behavior must be understood from the cultural context in which it develops (Pedersen, Carter, & Ponterotto, 1996). This includes not only the behavior of clients from culturally diverse groups, but also the culture-embedded practices of psychology. Counsellors must be prepared to work with client populations whose problems may not be adequately understood using prevailing theoretical perspectives. Contributing to the current problems associated with "ethnocentric monoculturalism" (Sue et al., 1998) is the overemphasis on Western cultural values in predominating theories of psychology. Counsellors are prone to ethnocentrism when their theoretical orientations are based in culturally specific values and when assessment and intervention strategies do not incorporate culturally relevant information regarding their clients (Dana, 1998; Daniels & D'Andrea, 1996).

Although it is important for counsellors to gain an understanding of the culture-specific behaviors of their clientele, an emphasis on "other groups" should not override the responsibility for counsellors to understand the social influences that shape their personal and professional practices. It has been strongly argued that failure to attend to the influence of one's cultural background leads to cultural encapsulation in training practices, research, and delivery of counselling services (Casas & Mann, 1996; Daniels & D'Andrea, 1996; Pedersen, 1995). For example, Ridley and colleagues (Ridley, Mendoza, Kanitz, Angermeier, & Zenk, 1994) have suggested that a counsellor's cultural sensitivity is related to perceptual schemas that are developed through cultural conditioning. The perceptual schemas possessed by a counsellor influence how information in the environment, including client behavior, is defined and interpreted. Schemas may serve to limit or expand culture-filtered meanings about counsellor-client interactions, depending upon previous experience and exposure. Cultural differences between the counsellor and the client may be processed in ways that are overly limiting or contain distorted meanings that are congruent with the cultural perceptual schema of the counsellor but serve to misdiagnose or pathologize the behavior of clients. Consequently, the axiom, "Counsellor, know thyself!" has been coined as a prerogative to increase self-awareness about the influences of culture on personal development and the ways in which professional activities are molded by particular views of human nature (Sue et al., 1998). It follows that counsellor education must include curriculum that not only explores the social and cultural bases of behavior, but must also challenge counsellors to examine the cultural contexts that have influenced their own behavior, attitudes, and beliefs. As the multicultural perspective gains momentum, there is growing recognition that counsellors must

be assisted to move from a position that assumes a singular, monocultural reality, to adopting a worldview that is respectful of multiple belief systems (Daniels & D'Andrea, 1996).

Although most counsellor education programs now include curriculum aimed at multicultural issues, there are wide variations in curriculum content and instructional methods (Bluestone, Stokes, & Kuba, 1996; Ridley, Mendoza & Kanitz, 1994; Rungta, Margolis, & Westwood, 1993), and evaluation studies of multicultural counselling are only beginning to appear in the literature (e.g., Bluestone et al., 1996; Brown, Parham, & Yonker, 1996; D'Andrea, Daniels, & Heck, 1991). Existing research suggests that graduates remain ill-equipped to manage the diversity of their caseloads (Pope-Davis & Ottavi, 1994; Zayas et. al., 1996). Notable discrepancies have been reported between the adequacy of counsellor training and the competencies of graduates who continue to serve culturally diverse clientele (Allison, Crawford, Echemendia, Robinson, & Knepp, 1994; Allison et al., 1996). In general, the results from these studies suggest that counsellors have developed multicultural competencies primarily through trial and error practices with clients. Along with curriculum changes, attention must also be paid to the process through which multicultural competencies are acquired, and the effectiveness of new training approaches and methods (Ridley, Espelage, & Rubinstein, 1997).

The purpose of this study was to conduct an exploratory investigation of a new course initiative at the University of Calgary in counsellor education for working with culturally diverse populations. The study was intended to investigate (a) the outcomes of curriculum targeting multicultural competencies, (b) whether prior training experience in multicultural counselling would have an impact on the learning outcomes of students in a graduate level course, and, (c) student's meaningful learning experiences during the acquisition of multicultural counselling competencies.

Method

Participants

Participants were graduate students registered in the first year of a graduate program in Counselling Psychology at the University of Calgary. All students enrolled in a graduate course, Equity and Individual Needs I, were invited in writing and during a class presentation to participate in the study on a volunteer basis. The range of participant ages was 23 to 53. Out of a potential participant pool of forty-five students, nineteen participants (18 females and 1 male) completed questionnaire measures used in the study. The ethnicity of participants was primarily Anglo-Saxon (16) and three participants indicated Italian, Asian, and Middle Eastern ethnicity.

The Multicultural Course

Equity and Individual Needs I was a 7-week graduate course aimed at developing multicultural competencies in the areas of self-awareness, knowledge, and skills. The course curriculum was co-instructed by three professors who have expertise in areas of diversity education. Specific attention was paid in the curriculum planning so that each class would include theoretical knowledge regarding diversity, experiential learning to enhance participants' self-awareness regarding diversity issues, and discussion of the applications with culturally diverse populations. The instructional design of the course was chosen to expose students to the parallel competency domains of knowledge, self-awareness, and skill development. Students were assigned selected readings to expose them to topics that the instructors felt would prompt critical inquiry about how counselling and related professional practices are situated in a cultural context. Assigned course readings included the following major topics: Terminology and meanings of culture-related constructs, White privilege, the social construction of disability, gender and power, racial identity,

acculturation, unintentional racism, and discrimination. The course curriculum was designed to be cultural general, or etic (Dana, 1998), in order to expose students to broad issues of culture in professional practice. This choice was made to keep the content focused on themes that challenged students to examine their ethnocentric biases without the potential distraction of focusing on specific cultural groups. A second course, which was designed to take an emic approach to culture, was planned for the following semester.

Students were expected to read assigned material prior to classes. Class time was devoted to discussion of assigned reading with the overriding guideline of exploring implications for personal and professional practices. During each class, an experiential learning activity pertaining to the major topics was conducted to encourage students to develop cultural understandings at both cognitive and affective levels (Ridley & Lingle, 1996). Students were required to keep a personal learning journal during the course. Other course assignments involved investigating diversity issues pertaining to their chosen field of professional practice and developing a plan for continued personal and professional development. During the first year that the course was offered in this format, student feedback into the design and delivery was considered to be particularly important for future curriculum planning. Further, the study attempted to incorporate recent recommendations regarding assessment of the acquisition of multicultural competencies in counsellor education (Sodowsky & Impara, 1996; Sue et al., 1998).

Procedure and Measures

Following the introductory and final classes, students completed a standardized measure of multicultural competencies, the Multicultural Counselling Awareness Scale - Form B: Revised Self Assessment (MCAS) (Ponterotto, Rieger, Barrett, & Sparks, 1994; Ponterotto, Sanchez, & Magids, 1991). In a demographic questionnaire, students were asked about their prior educational and work experiences in multicultural counselling. On a weekly basis at the end of each class, students also completed an open-ended questionnaire about critical incidents from their learning experiences.

Standardized Measure. The MCAS (Ponterotto et al., 1991) is a 45 item counsellor self-rating scale with several items reverse keyed. Responses are rated on a 7-point Likert-type format ranging from not all true (0) to totally true (7). Based on the conceptual paper of multicultural competencies (Sue et al., 1992), the subscales measure multicultural knowledge/skills (e.g., "I am knowledgeable of acculturation models for various ethnic minority groups") and awareness (e.g., "I feel that all the recent attention directed toward multicultural issues in counselling is overdone and not really warranted"). Three social desirability items are included (e.g., "At this point in my professional development, I feel I could benefit little from clinical supervision of my multicultural client caseload") (Ponterotto et al., 1994).

The reliability of the MCAS has been reported in two studies (Ponterotto et al., 1991; Pope-Davis, Ottavi, & Dings, 1994) with coefficient alphas of .93 and .92 for the knowledge/skills factor and .78 and .72 for the awareness factor. The low to moderate correlation of .37 between the two factors supports the MCAS as bidimensional.

Initial item selection based upon the counselling literature was followed with independent card sorts by the original authors of the MCAS (Ponterotto et al., 1991), resulting in the separate sorting of awareness and common grouping of knowledge and skills. Five experts who had published in multicultural counselling then rated each of the 70 items for clarity and domain appropriateness (Ponterotto et al., 1994). A two-factor solution of knowledge/skills and awareness was reported to account for 28% of the common variance tested through principal components analysis (Ponterotto et al., 1991). In studies using graduate students and community-based professionals to establish

criterion-related validity (Ponterotto et al., 1991; Pope-Davis et al., 1994), a similar pattern of results emerged: Students with higher levels of education scored significantly higher on knowledge/skills component; experts in multicultural counselling scored significantly higher than did both practicing school counsellor and graduate student samples on both knowledge/skills and awareness; counsellors of ethnic minority backgrounds scored significantly higher on the knowledge/skills factor than did White American counsellors, and graduate students overall scored significantly higher on awareness than did the school counsellor sample. Respondents who had received supervised clinical training with a minority clientele and those who had completed a multicultural course or workshop scored significantly higher on the knowledge/skills Factor (Ponterotto et al., 1991).

Critical Incidents. The use of critical incidents has been identified by researchers as a methodology for capturing students' reactions to cross-cultural material and experiences (Heppner & O'Brien, 1994; Neville, Heppner, Louie, Thompson, Brooks, & Baker, 1996). As applied in adult education, the use of critical incidents requires students to respond to a set of focused questions designed to uncover students' outstanding learning experiences (Brookfield, 1995). In this study, critical incident data was collected from participants at 6 time intervals during the course in response to the following five open-ended prompts: (a) Describe an outstanding learning experience from this week, (b) Describe the aspects of this week's course that were most useful for your learning, (c) Describe the aspects of this week's course that were least useful for your learning, (d) Describe something that you learned about yourself this week, and, (e) Describe the skills you have acquired or improved upon this week.

In order to protect the identity of students, all questionnaires were number coded. As the researcher was also one of three instructors in the course, the data was not analyzed until the completion of the course and all grades were submitted. Responses to the critical incident questionnaires were independently analyzed by two trained raters who were familiar with qualitative procedures for content analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Questionnaires completed during the first two weeks of the course were coded together by the raters in order to develop a categorical framework for analyzing the remaining data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Content analysis proceeded using a method of constant comparison (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). The raters separately reviewed the data, comparing the meaning contained in each sentence of student responses with previously established categories. When student responses were not contained within the existing categorical framework, new categories were added. All previous responses were reviewed to ensure accuracy of coding and placement within the modified categorical framework. The raters then met to compare categorical codes and assignment of individual responses to those codes. Discrepancies were subsequently negotiated until consensus was reached and previous coding was reviewed to ensure accurate categorization of the data.

Results

Data collected From the standardized questionnaire were analyzed using two way (Prior Training, Course) MANOVAs with the subscales of Self-Awareness, Knowledge/Skills, Social Desirability, and the Total scale scores of the MCAS. The between subject factor represented the classification of students who had prior exposure to multicultural counselling training and those who had no prior training in multicultural counselling. The within subject Factor of course had two levels representing the time effect of participating in the 7-week graduate level course directed at the acquisition of multicultural counselling competencies. Mean scores for the MANOVA analyses are represented in Table 1.

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations for Pre- and Post-Test Measures of the MCAS

MCAS Scales	N	Pre-test		Post-test	
Self-Awareness Subscale					
Course Level 1	6	83.00	(9.55)	85.83	(5.12)
Course Level 2	13	84.08	(6.05)	89.92	(5.89)
Prior training	10	84.00	(7.42)	88.30	(6.58)
No prior training	9	83.44	(7.09)	89.00	(5.27)
Total Sample	19	83.74	(7.07)	88.63	(5.84)
Knowledge/Skills Subscale					
Course Level 1	6	83.17	(16.55)	112.33	(13.06)
Course Level 2	13	92.92	(13.52)	126.31	(23.44)
Prior training	10	90.60	(18.66)	132.30	(21.62)
No prior training	9	89.00	(10.05)	110.33	(14.82)
Total sample	19	89.84	(14.82)	121.90	(21.41)
Social Desirability Subscale					
Course Level 1	6	3.83	(1.17)	5.00	(2.00)
Course Level 2	13	5.62	(2.99)	5.31	(2.40)
Prior training	10	6.40	(3.06)	6.10	(2.69)
No prior training	9	3.56	(.73)	4.22	(.83)
Total sample	19	5.05	(2.66)	5.21	(2.20)
Total Scale Score					
Course Level 1	6	166.17	(13.59)	198.17	(14.15)
Course Level 2	13	177.00	(14.78)	216.23	(24.04)
Prior training	10	174.60	(19.48)	220.60	(23.13)
No prior training	9	172.44	(8.59)	199.33	(17.02)
Total sample	19	173.58	(14.96)	210.53	(22.70)

Note. Standard Deviations are shown in parentheses.

Multicultural Competencies in Self-Awareness

The MANOVA testing the course effect on the Self-Awareness subscale of the MCAS was significant, $F(1,17) = 13.89$, $p < .002$. Tests of the training effect, $F(1,17) = 2.91$, $p < .106$, and the training by course interaction effect, $F(1, 17) = .15$, $p < .71$, were not significant.

In the MANOVA testing the between subjects effect on the Self-Awareness subscale, there were no significant differences in the degree of self-awareness attained by students based on prior training experience, $F(1, 17) = .01$, $p < .98$ and there was no significant training by course

interaction effect, $F(1,17) = .31$, $p < .58$ Rather, the shift in self-awareness over time was related to the course effect, $F(1, 17) = 19.16$, $p < .001$.

Multicultural Competencies in Knowledge/Skills

In the MANOVA testing the time effect on the Knowledge/Skills subscale of the MCAS, there was no significant training effect, $F(1,17) = 2.91$, $p < .106$, and no significant interaction training by course interaction effect, $F(1, 17) = .15$, $p < .709$, however, there was a significant course effect, $F(1,17) = 31.99$, $p < .001$.

Similarly, the MANOVA testing the between subjects effect on the Knowledge/Skills subscale produced no significant training effect, $F(1, 17) = 3.40$, $p < .08$. There was a significant main effect for course, $F(1,17) = 48.16$, $p < .001$, and a significant training by course interaction effect, $F(1,17) = 5.03$, $p < .05$. Although the mean scores of students were relatively similar on the pretest measure, students who had some prior training in multicultural counselling made the greatest gain on self-reported knowledge and skills at the end of the course.

Total Scale Scores

The MANOVAs performed using the total scale scores of the MCAS showed a similar pattern of results as was reported for the Knowledge/Skills subscale. There were no significant findings for the training effect, $F(1,17) = 3.76$, $p < .07$ and no significant training by course effect, $F(1, 17) = .49$, $p < .49$. The significant shift in the total score on the multicultural competencies scale from pre- to post-test appeared as the main effect of course, $F(1,17), = 47.49$, $p < .001$. There was no significant training effect on the total scale scores, $F(1,17) = 2.70$, $p < .12$, but there was a significant course effect on the total scale score, $F(1,17) = 72.01$, $p < .001$, and a significant training by course interaction effect, $F(1,17) = 4.95$, $p < .05$. Inspection of the means shows that while students had relatively similar scores on the pretest measure, students with some prior experience reported higher overall scores on multicultural competencies at the end of the course.

Social Desirability Scores

In the MANOVA comparing the reported social desirability of responses on multicultural competencies, there were no significant course effects. However, the MANOVA testing the effects of prior multicultural training produced an interesting result. There was a significant difference between the social desirability reported by students who had some prior experience and no prior experience in multicultural counselling course work, $F(1, 17) = 7.67$, $p < .013$. Inspection of the mean scores of students at both pretest and posttest times showed that students who had some prior coursework in multicultural counselling had higher scores on social desirability. However, no participants scored at the level indicative of social desirability contamination and the data reported for this scale is considered as exploratory at this time (Ponterotto et al., 1991).

Critical Incident Responses

The findings from the critical incident responses are summarized below, noting the major themes that emerged from students' responses to their learning experiences. Based upon responses to the focused questions, themes were grouped according to the categories of outstanding learning experiences, helpful learning activities, least helpful learning activities, learning about self, and student descriptions of their acquisition of particular multicultural competencies.

Outstanding learning experiences. Students acknowledged key learning experiences in both an increasing personal awareness, or insights regarding the application of course material on diversity to their own lives, and increasing knowledge regarding diversity issues from the experiences of others. In terms of the instructional methodology, experiential learning exercises were noted most favorably by students, followed by assigned readings and video presentations. Students preferred learning through the interaction of class discussion regarding diversity topics, with few students

preferring the traditional lecture format. Class interaction with other students, particularly early in the course, allowed students to explore their own personal meanings through contrasts and the sharing of experiences with other students.

Helpful learning activities. Responses to this question underscored the perceived helpfulness of group discussion and experiential exercises to enhance student learning. Other highlights included the personal experiences and disclosure offered through course discussion that helped to apply the assigned course readings. The opportunity for active learning and participation was viewed as considerably more helpful than passive modes such as lectures and working individually on course assignments.

Least helpful learning activities. The overwhelming number of responses (75% of the responses made to this probe) indicated that the learning activities used in the course were valuable for students. Activities noted to be least helpful (only 1 to 4 responses at each time) included the structure of introductions, quality of discussion, specific course readings, specific learning activities, and focus on problems in discussing diversity topics.

Learning about self. Students consistently reported an increased self-awareness through exploring personal values and beliefs throughout the course. This included recognizing their experiences of privilege, oppression, and other cultural variables such as gender influences on their development. Several students noted their discomfort and dissonance that accompanied self-discovery. Particularly during the first half of the course, students experienced their perceived lack of knowledge regarding diversity issues as a challenge and motivation for learning which was translated into intentions and actual plans for personal action.

Multicultural competency acquisition. Students reported twice the number of multicultural competencies related to self-awareness in comparison to knowledge and skill acquisition. Students reported a heightened sense of personal awareness through considering their own experiences with diversity. Students noted their personal growth through being challenged to self-examine and consider their experience with culture, including taking increased personal responsibility for their actions. Considerable knowledge acquisition was noted as a result of exposure to course content, including knowledge regarding the impact of oppression on others and the need to continue pursuing knowledge in professional practice. Students reported the acquisition of multicultural skill competencies at a lower rate than self-awareness or knowledge. Noted skill improvement areas included communication and empathy, critical thinking, general application to practice situations, and the need to increase skills.

Discussion

The results of the study indicate that participation in a graduate course on diversity issues in professional practices had an impact on the self-reported multicultural competencies of graduate students. Over a 7-week period, students reported significant increases in both their self-awareness and knowledge/skills for working with culturally diverse clients. Before working in professional roles, it is essential that counsellors-in-training consider the values and beliefs that they bring to those professional roles. Without curriculum directed at counsellor self-awareness, the problems associated with ethnocentrism in service delivery are likely to be perpetuated (Casas & Mann, 1996; Daniels & D'Andrea, 1996; Pedersen, 1995). Through understanding the cultural values influencing assessment and intervention decisions in professional practice, counsellors may be in a better position to acknowledge and incorporate the needs of clients whose backgrounds are culturally diverse to their own (Dana, 1998). As suggested in professional standards for multicultural counselling competencies (Arredondo et al., 1996; Sue et al., 1992), self-awareness is a precondition to the application of knowledge and skills with culturally diverse populations. The

results of this study suggest that the diverse experiences of students do not need to detract from the relevance of course material. It may be beneficial to have multiple perspectives from which to examine core course topics and gain exposure to contrasting values and beliefs. Instruction that promotes both experiential and theoretical learning activities promotes the acquisition of competencies for professional practice with culturally diverse clients.

This study utilized both a standardized instrument and critical incidents in the methodology to examine the impact of exposure to multicultural curriculum in a graduate level course. The research design incorporated recommendations regarding the measurement of student competencies using established multicultural counselling inventories (Sodowsky & Impara, 1996; Sue et al., 1998) and the use of a qualitative method to better understand the learning process in multicultural education (Merchant & Dupuy, 1996). However, the study has several limitations that must be acknowledged. The sample size limits both the statistical power of the applied methods and the generalizability of the study. Greater numbers of students and greater diversity of gender and ethnicity would permit comparisons between student groups in their response to curriculum topics (Sue et al., 1998). Also, the volunteer nature of the sample may have biased results in that those who chose not to participate may have engaged in a different learning process.

Despite these limitations, this exploratory study adds to our understanding of the potential outcomes of graduate student education for working with culturally diverse populations. It suggests that students respond favorably to curriculum content and teaching methodology that extend beyond the traditional lecture format. Building personal relevancy of material and the opportunity to engage in experiential learning are key aspects of instructional design for promoting self-examination of the social influences of personal and professional practices. Curriculum that challenges students to engage in a reflective process regarding personal values models a process for future work with diverse clients. By orchestrating learning experiences that explore the meaning of cultural values, both one's own and those of others, students are encouraged to adopt an ongoing process for culture-responsive professional practice.

Although the results of this study demonstrate a significant shift in the acquisition of multicultural counselling skills over a 7-week course, it is unreasonable to expect that one course will fulfill the mandate of practice competencies specified for professional counsellors (Arredondo et al., 1996). As the development of intervention skills and strategies are most likely to be incorporated through direct contact with diverse clientele, students need real life experience with multicultural case management through supervised practicum and fieldwork (Allison et al., 1994; Daniels & D'Andrea, 1996). Curriculum and course assignments that provide interaction with people from culturally diverse populations can assist students to transfer awareness and knowledge into the skill domain.

Conclusion

The increasing cultural diversity of our population poses challenge for preparing professionals to develop multicultural counselling competencies. It is timely for counsellor educators to examine the extent to which cultural constructs are embedded in course curriculum and to consider ways that instructional methodology can assist students to develop multicultural counselling competencies. Through incorporating ongoing assessment as a complimentary process with curriculum development, counsellor educators will be in a better position to determine effective ways to prepare counsellors for working with culturally diverse populations. Counsellor educators are encouraged to be explicit about the methodology used to teach multicultural competencies. Ultimately, educational outcomes must be transferable to competent professional practices with culturally diverse clientele.

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